

## **U.S. District Court Sponsors Civics Education Event for Sheyenne High Students**

On January 19, 2022, 48 students from West Fargo's Sheyenne High School participated in a Civics Education event organized by Magistrate Judge Alice R. Senechal at the Quentin M. Burdick Federal Courthouse in Fargo. The program, developed as part of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts' national educational outreach, is designed to encourage civil debate and critical thinking. Some students served as attorneys and argued their position before a judge, while a jury, made up of the rest of the students, listened, deliberated, and declared a victor.

The students were assigned to one of two courtrooms. The program began with facilitators—Elizabeth Alvine and Judge Senechal—leading a discussion about the importance of civility and setting ground rules for the students' discussions. With the ground rules set, case preparation got underway. On the docket was the application of the Supreme Court's student free speech case Tinker v. Des Moines to a scenario where students staged a walkout to protest a policy banning clothing that conveyed a message of any kind.

Four students served as attorneys in each courtroom, crafting their arguments with help from volunteer attorneys. Meanwhile, the students serving as jurors discussed the issues in the case and, with the assistance of volunteer attorneys, formulated questions for the judge to ask the student-attorneys.

As the student-attorneys took their place at the counsel tables, the court was called to order and the judge took the bench. Presiding over the arguments were Chief Judge Peter Welte and Bankruptcy Judge Shon Hastings. Each student attorney made an opening statement and then answered questions from the judge. The student-attorneys performed exceptionally.

At the close of oral argument, the student-jury deliberated with the assistance of their respective facilitators. The jury discussed the points made by the student-attorneys and debated how to apply Tinker to the situation before them. Ultimately, in the case of Students v. School Officials, the jury in one courtroom ruled for the students, and the jury in the other courtroom ruled in favor of the school officials. Chief Judge Welte and Bankruptcy Judge Hastings then introduced themselves and answered questions from the students.

Volunteer attorneys were Dan Phillips, Lori Conroy, Richard Lee, Rhi Gorham, Matt Greenley, Alex Stock, Patrick Sinner, MaryBeth Hagsted and Kevin Thomson.

The teachers, students, and volunteer attorneys all considered the event successful. The court hopes to host similar events in the future.



*Students from Sheyenne High School in Courtroom 1 with Chief Judge Welte*



*Students from Sheyenne High School in Courtroom 2 with Bankruptcy Judge Hastings and Magistrate Judge Senechal*